



CUYAHOGA COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS DIVISION OF DOMESTIC RELATIONS

ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE
HON. DIANE M. PALOS

COURT ADMINISTRATOR
JAMES S. ZAK

JUDGES
HON. LESLIE ANN CELEBREZZE
HON. FRANCINE B. GOLDBERG
HON. TONYA R. JONES
HON. COLLEEN ANN REALI

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Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court Launches Virtual Help Center

*Online Platform Helps Everyone, Regardless of Income,
Better Navigate the Court Process*

Cleveland, Ohio – Dealing with family law matters like divorce, child custody, and child support is difficult for anyone. But it's especially hard for individuals who don't have access to an attorney and must navigate the legal system on their own. The Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court, in partnership with Ohio Legal Help, have developed a virtual help center to make going to court a little easier and a lot less daunting for self-represented litigants.

Ohio Legal Help, a free civil legal assistance web portal, and the Domestic Relations Court built the virtual help center for people who must deal with family law matters without the aid of an attorney. The project began under Judge Leslie Ann Celebrezze's leadership and was funded through a Technology Grant from the Supreme Court of Ohio. Celebrezze explained, "Recognizing the increasing number of self-represented parties in our court, we sought funding to create a virtual help center to provide an additional level of service to court users."

The virtual help center enables self-represented litigants to find information pertaining to the Domestic Relations Court and fill out, save and complete court forms online. The secure, mobile-first platform seamlessly integrates with the court's existing online resources.

Judge Francine B. Goldberg, who serves on the Supreme Court of Ohio's Commission on Technology and the Courts stated, "The Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court is a leader in innovative technology initiatives. These innovations include the Navigation/Self Help Center, the CourtConnect mobile app, and now the virtual help center. Our investment in technological advancements provide meaningful access to justice for our citizens and litigants."

The virtual help center will remove many of the barriers to justice that people face when they're dealing with the legal system. "More than 92% of legal issues faced by low-income individuals receive little or no legal help, and many people are forced to navigate complex legal issues, including family law, on their own," said Administrative Judge Diane M. Palos. "The virtual help center will provide people with the information they need to navigate the court process," continued Palos.

The court, which has jurisdiction over divorce, dissolution, domestic violence, child custody, child support and other family law matters, has always worked to improve access to justice for all of its constituents.

Judge Tonya R. Jones describes the virtual help center as an innovative example of how technology can aid self-represented litigants in navigating the court system. Jones explained, “The virtual help center reflects our commitment to increasing court access for all citizens of Cuyahoga County, regardless of their means or ability to access an attorney.”

Judge Colleen Reali, who joined the Domestic Relations Court as a Judge in January 2020 and was appointed to the Ohio Legal Help Advisory Committee in January 2023, worked closely with Ohio Legal Help to develop the domestic relations online guided steps, improving access to the court through the necessary forms and procedures.

Judge Reali feels strongly about access for all residents and families who come to our court for help during a difficult period in their lives. Judge Reali explained, “Online assistance providing guided steps to complete domestic relations court forms is relatively new to Ohio. Cuyahoga County is one of the first courts to offer this valuable service to residents and the families we serve, who now have the ability to complete necessary forms at their convenience and without an attorney.”

Reali continued, “In partnering with Ohio Legal Help, the Domestic Relations Court is able to provide this effective tool to modernize court services and improve the public’s navigation of legal proceedings online.”

Ohio Legal Help has a proven record of developing and launching online services that focus on usability, simplicity, and scalability. The organization launched in 2019 as a result of the Ohio Supreme Court’s Task Force on Access to Justice recommendation to “develop and maintain a statewide website devoted to providing free and accurate legal information to Ohio residents.” In just five years, Ohio Legal Help has served over 3.3 million users across the state.

“We’re grateful for the generosity of the Supreme Court of Ohio and the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court for working on this project. The heart of our mission is to reach more users where they are, and this Virtual Help Center will do that,” said Susan Choe, executive director of Ohio Legal Help. “Now Cuyahoga residents can start their court cases from their own home, without the need to take time off work, arrange childcare, or secure transportation to the courthouse.”

Cuyahoga County has about 1.2 million residents, and over 16% of them live below the federal poverty level. Those in the lower income brackets who cannot afford legal representation will be the primary beneficiaries of the virtual help center, but it will be available for all self-represented litigants with a matter in the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court, which handles around 7,000 cases a year.

“All of the judges are excited about this project because it’s going to make a significant difference for thousands of people in our community who are dealing with difficult family law matters,” concluded Judge Palos.

The link to the virtual help center can be found by visiting ccdrcc.ohiolegalhelp.org or by [visiting the Court’s website](#).

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